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doubt. At Szegedin, in the first nine days of its existence, 284 persons had been attacked, of which number 124 had died. In Trieste in one week there were 70 cases, of which 39 were fatal. The disease has existed in this city certainly since June, during which time it has attacked 859 persons, 271 of whom have succumbed. The disease has also ravaged Istria, having had since July, in that province alone, 662 victims, with 368 deaths. The appearance of this malady in Buenos Ayres seems to be well authenticated, and some of the southern ports of our own country, notably Galveston and New Orleans, which are in commercial intercourse with that country, have already instituted a quarantine against it. It is said that there are a number of vessels due in these two ports from Buenos Ayres about Christmas.

— The St. Petersburg *Oriental review* of Nov. 4 says that the eminent Mongolian explorer Potanin returned safely on the 22d of October to the Siberian frontier town of Kiachta, after an absence of three years spent in the exploration of Mongolia and China. Throughout his long and difficult journey, Mr. Potanin was accompanied by his wife. The expedition was undertaken by order and at the expense of the Imperial Russian geographical society; and the *Oriental review* says, "We expect the richest and most valuable results from this scientific exploration of China and Mongolia."

— The meeting of the next oriental congress has been postponed until 1890. The executive committee of the congress is preparing a memorial, which will be signed by the Archduke Renier, to the trustees of the British museum and the British secretary of state for home affairs, praying that a bill be introduced into parliament empowering the museum to lend the oriental manuscripts in its possession to foreign *savants*.

— The physical hydrographic field-work of the coast survey in New York bay and harbor has closed for the season, and Professor Mitchell is now at the home office working up his notes. The computations of pendulum work of Lieutenant Greely's party at Lady Franklin Bay are expected to be completed by Dec. 1. The coast survey report for 1885 will be ready for distribution about Jan. 1. It contains a number of valuable appendices, among them 'The magnetic dip intensities,' by C. A. Schott, and 'The currents and temperatures of the Gulf Stream,' by Lieut. J. E. Pillsbury, U.S.N. Owing to the lack of funds to prosecute the topographic work in California, all operations there will be closed for the season about Dec. 15.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

*\*Correspondents are requested to be as brief as possible. The writer's name is in all cases required as proof of good faith.*

### Laws against quacks.

My attention has been called to an editorial note on p. 447 of *Science* (viii. No. 198), in which, apropos of a recent arrest of one violating the law regulating the practice of medicine in this state, injustice is done to the Medical society of the county of New York.

I assume that this injustice, which seems to have arisen out of a misapprehension both of the law and the facts of the case, was of course unintentional, and that you will give equal publicity to the statement of the counsel of that society, who caused the arrest, and was successful in the action, which, as you said, was brought against him for damages.

The part of your note to which I except runs as follows: "It is absurd as a matter of common sense that registration in one county should not be sufficient, rather than that a man should be required to register in all the counties of the state if he desires to practise in them; and, as appears from an unwritten opinion given by two judges of the supreme court of this state, it is equally absurd as a matter of law." As to the absurdity, from the stand-point of common sense, of requiring registration in every county in which a physician regularly practises, I venture to differ with you: that is a mere matter of opinion. The object of the law is to provide in every county a list of physicians regularly practising therein, for the information of the public and the protection of physicians against prosecution. The construction you give the law would necessitate the examination of the records in the offices of sixty county clerks, before any prosecution could be commenced; and you might with as much justice declare it a hardship to require a judgment to be docketed in every county in which it is to be enforced. The only theory on which it is absurd to require a physician moving from one county to another to register in the latter, is this: that the act of registration *per se* has some saving grace whereby a physician who performs it becomes wiser and more skilful in his calling. But, unless registration is analogous to baptism, I fail to see the absurdity you declare exists; although I readily admit that a state registration law, like that provided for in the medical act of Great Britain, would be a great improvement over the present clumsy system. The second part of your sentence, however, is a statement, not of opinion, but of fact, and is absolutely incorrect. No judge or judges in this state have rendered any such opinion as you mention. On the contrary, four years ago, in the case of *Hayes vs. Webster*, — an action against the president of the county society for malicious prosecution in causing the arrest of a practitioner registered in Queens county, — Judge Freedman, of the superior court of this city, directed a verdict for defendant on the ground that not only was the arrest on probable cause, but that it was President Webster's duty to make it. In the case against myself, to which you refer, Judge Lewis of the supreme court directed a verdict in my favor on the plaintiff's own testimony, upon the same grounds. The criminal courts have held in the same way. In Texas, under a statute like ours, the court of appeals has held, that, on removal from one county to another, a physician must register anew. The court said, "The object of the law was to protect the

people against charlatans and quacks. To attain this purpose most effectually, no better plan could have been devised than to require that the people, at least, should be notified in advance, or have at their command the means of notifying themselves, of the authority and qualifications of those proposing to engage in a profession so nearly affecting the lives and health of themselves and families. Without some such notice and information, *the law would become entirely nugatory*" (Hilliard vs. The state, 7 Tex. appeals 69). The clerk of Kings county in this matter is a law to himself. There is no decision to sustain his position, and I have his admission that what you call 'an opinion' is not an opinion in any legal sense of the term.

One word as to the facts in the case you refer to. A notice calling the attention of the person arrested to the law was mailed him, and another was sent to his house. No reply was received to either. A 'sandwich advertisement' paraded Broome Street, calling attention to the 'Live and let live dispensary' conducted in his name. It is true he was locked up for fifteen minutes, but owing, I was told, to his conduct in the court. His entire detention did not last three hours. I consented to his discharge when I found that he was technically able to obey the law. He claimed to have offended through ignorance, and I accepted his statement without thoroughly believing it. I could have convicted him. He rewarded my leniency by bringing his absurd suit, that had no chance of success. He admitted, on cross-examination, that his verified complaint did not truly and fully state the facts of his arrest and the charge against him.

I have written at some length because you have been evidently misled. It is not possible for you to find an instance—I will not say of a reputable practitioner—of a person technically qualified to practise physic, or able to so qualify, who has been improperly prosecuted by the society. What has been done during the year by them appears in their annual report.

W. A. PURINGTON.

New York, Nov. 29.

[The letter which we print above comes too late to enable us to ascertain whether the case to which our correspondent refers in the next to the last paragraph of his letter is the same as the one to which we had reference in the editorial on p. 447 of *Science* (viii. No. 198); but we shall immediately investigate it, and, if any injustice has been done in the matter, it shall be rectified. The facts as stated by us were received from the physician himself, and we have known him for many years as a reputable practitioner and a graduate of one of the best medical colleges in the country. In reference to the 'opinion,' we do not know exactly how formal a declaration must be to make it 'legal'; but there is in the office of the county clerk of Kings county a memorandum, made by the clerk in his official book of registration, that on a given date, which we do not now recall, in the year 1885, Justices Cullen and Bartlett of the supreme court, on an application for advice by the clerk, gave it as their opinion that it was absurd that a physician should be expected to register in every county of the state, and that opinion has been the guide of the county clerk in the matter. We regret that we are unable to give the exact language of this opinion by reason of lack of time, but will do so in our next issue. —ED.]

### The teaching of natural history.

Referring to your last issue, 'A. Reader's' difficulty seems to be that he looks upon the scientific name of an object as an *end-in-itself*; and, if I were to respond to his invitation to turn instructor in natural history for his special benefit, I should roughly counsel *him* (for he is evidently an old sinner), first of all to let names altogether alone. As, however, this is my first essay in teaching, I may be quite at fault, and perhaps am leaning too much on my own experience, when, after three years of working by myself on the name-plan, and thinking I knew a precious bit of entomology, I was brought to a dead halt by Agassiz, who gave me the outside of one dead fish to stare at for three long days, and afterwards some hundreds to describe and classify without any books and without any names. Letters and numerals were enough for that; and not till the work was done did I know what other people called these fish, otherwise than that Agassiz used the single word 'Haemulon' for them all, used simply as 'fish' might be,—as a mere convenience. Needless to say that I returned to entomology with a different and a more humble spirit. Looking as I do upon that lesson as my set-off in science, I may be giving it a too universal application, for I have had no experience in actual teaching; still, if I were to sum up my own conviction as to the proper method of teaching in natural history, it would be: specimens rather than (but not necessarily without) books; relationship rather than (but not necessarily excluding) names.

Now, to apply this to the little book (French's 'Butterflies') which seems to have sprung this discussion on a suffering public, and is thereby pretty well advertised. How much does it help a student to understand the relationship of our butterflies? There are three ways of doing this: 1°. By the actual arrangement of the material, a method which in the nature of things cannot be avoided. No reason for the particular sequence employed is given. 2°. By the definition of the groups. The arrangement provides for five families, twelve subfamilies or similar divisions, and fifty-one genera. Not a single one of the genera is defined; and, though short descriptions are given of the higher groups, these occupy, in all, scarcely more than 5 of the 305 pages given to the descriptive part of the book; all the rest is devoted to species. 3°. By analytical keys. One general key is given, and it occupies nearly twenty-six pages. Your reviewer called this "fairly good, so far as the perfect insect goes," and afterwards "faulty, because largely made up of unimportant characters, and because it takes no account of the earlier stages." 'A teacher' replies, "The key does trace into the families, the genera, and the species; and all the families and genera are more or less fully characterized either in the key or in the body of the work." As stated above, not one genus is characterized as such in the body of the work: therefore this must be interpreted as saying that all the genera are characterized in the key. This is true of all but *Melitaea* (the names of *Neonympha* and *Calephelis* having been accidentally omitted in their proper place); but let us see what the characterization amounts to, as a clew to arrangement or comparative structure. There are, in all, 443 categories used; but as 214 of these lead directly to species only, in which structural differences are much less to